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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 007259

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#) [PK](#) [AF](#) [INDO](#) [PAK](#) [UNGA](#)

SUBJECT: INDO-PAK UNGA MEETING POSITIVE, NO FIREWORKS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 6797

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 6520

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2884

Classified By: CDA Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The September 14, four-hour Manmohan Singh-Musharraf dinner meeting and joint statement on the sidelines of UNGA continued the positive bilateral vibe even if it did not produce new deliverables, MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan/Iran/Afghanistan) Dilip Sinha told us during a September 15 office call. He added that the Second Round of the Composite Dialogue was "satisfactory," and that the Third Round would run from January-June. Sinha shared with us some background to the massive prisoner exchange that preceded the UNGA meeting, and noted that many more Indo-Pak interactions are on the calendar, including planned visits to Pakistan by the Foreign Minister and the Indian cricket team. On transit rights for Indian aid to Afghanistan, he reported that Islamabad had offered a creative solution -- using Afghan trucks and drivers to deliver a food shipment -- that could be replicated for shipping the heavy equipment and cables needed to complete the Kabul-Phul-i-Khumri power project, and suggested that we might work with the GOI on a new agriculture project in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Joint Statement: "Neither Exultation nor Despair"

[1](#)2. (U) "Asian Age" Political Editor Seema Mustafa summed up the sentiment in Delhi that the anodyne joint statement from the September 14 Manmohan-Musharraf talks evinced "neither exultation, nor a sense of despair." From the Delhi perspective, the joint statement was long on positive language but broke no new ground. The "Times of India" described the meeting as "Another Chronicle of Wasted Time."

[1](#)3. (C) Although many Delhi-based Pakistan-watchers had set their sights on new breakthroughs at the UNGA meeting which the leaders failed to deliver (Ref B), Sinha remained upbeat. He did not have any inside scoop to share with us, but noted that the web of Indo-Pak interactions planned through June 2006 should keep the dialogue on track and would periodically produce tangible outcomes, like the accord on missile test notification and the MOU between the Indian Coast Guard and the Pakistani Maritime Agency that will be signed by the Foreign Ministers during the 3-5 October Ministerial in Islamabad. Former Director of the Observer Research Foundation's Pakistan Centre Sushant Sareen separately blamed the local media for hyping the event ahead of time in order to slam it afterwards.

Maintaining Pressure on Cross-Border Terrorism

[1](#)4. (C) The PM's New York comments attributing to Islamabad the ability to control "the flow of terror from Pakistan" was a pointed reminder that, for the GOI, cross-border terrorism is the "core issue" in Indo-Pak relations. Conversations with our GOI interlocutors on the prospect of substantial Indo-Pak progress are always underscored with the caveat that the process could be derailed if Islamabad allows cross-border terrorism to escalate. Furthermore, as the PM also pointed out in New York, any future troop reductions in J&K will be calibrated with the level and trajectory of infiltration and terrorist attacks. An assessment of recent and proposed changes in the Indian security posture in J&K will follow septel.

Relations Back on Track

[1](#)5. (C) Sinha labeled the September 1 Foreign Secretaries' meeting that wrapped up the Second Round of the Composite Dialogue as "satisfactory," although "it could have been better." In his view, the most significant outcomes from those talks were scheduling the Third Composite Dialogue Round for January-June 2006, and reviving the Indo-Pak Joint Commission to facilitate trade, transportation links, and other economic interactions. Sinha described the Commission, which had lain dormant since 1989, as an indicator that the relationship is "back on track." The Commission will be kicked off when the Foreign Ministers meet in Islamabad.

Prisoner Exchange a Massive Humanitarian CBM

16. (C) The run-up to the UNGA meeting was marked by a massive exchange of civilian prisoners. A total of 583 prisoners -- 435 Indian nationals who were jailed in Pakistan and 146 Pakistanis held in India -- were repatriated at the Wagah border on September 12. The swap had been on the books for months, but it did not become "a political issue for the Islamabad" until recently, according to Sinha. He told us he had demarched the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi for consular access to the Indian prisoners and their repatriation at least 3-4 times since he took his office in March, and at least six more demarches went via the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. In contrast, the Pakistanis became engaged only over the summer, Sinha said. Indian Home Secretary VK Duggal had proposed timing the release just

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prior to the Manmohan-Musharraf meeting for political effect, but Sinha told us that last-minute administrative hiccups from Islamabad -- including passing the names of over 60 of the prisoners in mid-July and insisting that the lot be cleared for the swap or they would call off the entire exchange -- nearly scuttled the event. Sinha described a massive logistical effort that went into mobilizing these Pakistani detainees from across India and getting them to the border by September 12.

The Calendar is Packed

17. (C) On Musharraf's offer to host the PM in Pakistan -- an offer first made during Musharraf's April visit to Delhi -- Sinha predicted it would take place during the first half of 2006. Ramadan will be in October, the SAARC summit in November, and then Parliament opens, he explained, ruling out 2005. Sinha added that there are two weeks at the end of December, after Parliament concludes, that have been a traditional time for Indo-Pak activity. This would be the PM's first visit to Pakistan since Partition -- he grew up in Gah, a Punjabi village that is now part of Pakistan.

18. (C) A raft of other bilateral interactions are also planned for the fall, including meetings on the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline and the deliverables from the April joint statement (such as opening the consulates and adding new transport links). Indo-Pak cricket has become an annual event, with the Indian team planning to travel to Pakistan in the January-February timeframe, Sinha added.

Facilitating Afghan Aid

19. (C) Picking up the thread of transit rights for Indian aid to Afghanistan, Sinha reported that some shipments have been cleared on a case-by-case basis, with the details usually sorted out between Islamabad and Kabul. Regarding reports of mini-vans being allowed transit, he clarified that the GOP had approved the shipment but, because it was not already in the GOI's assistance queue, Delhi would have to assemble the vans for future delivery. Sinha recalled that 230 busses out of a package of 600 were previously delivered overland through Pakistan.

110. (C) Furthermore, the next consignment of World Food Program aid from India will transit Pakistan, Sinha reported, in response to a request from the Afghan government. The modalities, coordinated with the Indian Embassy in Kabul, are for Afghan trucks and drivers to cross Pakistan, take delivery, and return to Afghanistan. Sinha suggested that if this arrangement proves successful and satisfies Islamabad's concerns, it could be the framework for shipping the heavy equipment and cables needed to complete the Kabul-Phul-i-Khumri power project. Because the GOI promised to convert cost savings from transit (vs. routing shipments through Iran), he joked that he would have to calculate how many extra substations India could now finance.

111. (C) Turning to the PM's August 28-29 visit to Kabul (Ref A), Sinha -- who was in the delegation -- suggested that one new area for Indo-US cooperation here would be in the agriculture sector, which he noted was of great interest to President Karzai. India is examining how "green revolution" methods might be made available to Afghanistan. He ended by reiterating that Iran was still uncooperative regarding the Zaranj-Delaram road project.

Comment: Prospects Still Good

112. (C) Despite some of the gloom-mongering in the press, Sinha's dispassionate assessment of the status of Indo-Pak affairs appears accurate. The deliverables list from last April are much less politically charged than the Composite Dialogue topics, and further progress on the April CBMs -- and additional benefits, such as possible future easing of transit restrictions for Afghan aid -- may be just what is

needed to pave the way for closure on the territorial and other sensitive items. As NDTV's Ajai Shukla commented to us, it was completely unrealistic to expect that India would have agreed to any major Indo-Pak breakthrough in New York, thereby cementing the notion of US mediation and handing a political club to the BJP. Rather, he suggested, we should take encouragement from what appears from here to be the increasing normalization of Indo-Pak relations. End Comment.

13. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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